

St. Mary's Roman Catholic School  
Northwest corner of Church Avenue  
and Guthrie Street  
McKees Rocks Borough  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5481

HABS  
PA,  
2. MCKRO,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
PA,  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL HABS NO. PA- 5481

Location: Northwest corner of Church Avenue and  
Guthrie Street, McKees Rocks Borough,  
Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

USGS Pittsburgh West, PA quadrangle  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
17.578975 - 4479407

Present Owner: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh  
111 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: St. Mary's School is a component of a National  
Register eligible complex of buildings. The  
complex is dominated by the St. Mary's Church.  
The school is important both in the history of the  
parish and as an example of its building type and  
style.

PART I. HISTORIC INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction began in July 1922 and was completed by September, 1923, according to Church records.
2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: The original and present owner of the building is the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.
4. Original plans and construction: No construction drawings for the building have been located.
5. Alterations and additions: Documentation exists for alterations to the heating system in 1958 and for architectural and plumbing alterations in 1964. Aluminum and glass entrances on north, east and west elevations were added in 1964. The entrances include glass block transoms. Glass block infill in the large openings above the doorways on the east and west elevations were added at the same time.

On the interior, hollow metal and glass partitions were installed in 1964 between the corridors and interior stairways.

- B. Historical Context: Father Jordan, Pastor of St. Mary's Parish, died in Bad Kissingen, Bavaria in September 1922, soon after construction on the school began. Father Leo Meyer was named the new pastor of St. Mary's. At the dedication ceremony in September, 1923, Bishop Hugh C. Boyle officiated.

The school curriculum originally covered grades one through twelve. By the 1970's, however, the parish became more largely composed of elderly people, as younger people moved out of the community. The last graduating class from St. Mary's School was in 1975. The elementary school continued operating until June 1979. Subsequently, all Catholic schools in the McKees Rocks area were consolidated at another facility.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: St. Mary's School typifies early 20th century architecture between the World Wars. It retains aspects of earlier revival styles while also displaying the influence of Modern Architecture. The composition is somewhat reminiscent of an Italian Renaissance palazzo.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in a sound condition on both the exterior and interior. The owners have continued to perform basic maintenance needs during the past several years during which the building has been unoccupied.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The overall composition is symmetrical, with a core consisting of the central entrance bay and two flanking bays. At the east and west sides are two projecting wings, also three bays wide each. The building is two stories tall with a basement level one half flight down from grade at the front. The overall dimensions of the building are 150'-0" x 86'-10".
2. Foundations: Below the basement window sill line, foundations are poured-in-place concrete. Above this line walls are 20" overall thick, faced in a tan/brown blend of textured brick. Brick is laid in common bond, with every seventh course flemish headers. The foundation terminates at the top with three corbelled rowlock courses.
3. Walls: The same brick used on the foundation continues above, in the same common bond. Window sills and door surrounds are Bedford, Indiana limestone. The door surrounds include pilasters and a carved freize/cornice. "St. Mary's School" is carved in the stone above the Church Street entrance. A decorative brick recessed panel, two stories tall, terminates the projecting wings on both the front and rear elevations. Terra cotta square panels are found at the top of the large brick panels and in the building freize. Decorative brickwork consisting of stack bond and rowlock courses with recessed panels defines major window bays and the freize between terra cotta panels.

4. Structural systems, framing: Exterior walls are load-bearing masonry, interior columns are steel, as are beams and girders. All steel is enclosed in plaster fireproofing. Floor and roof framing is of structural tile and concrete.
  5. Stoops: Six plain concrete steps lead to the Church Avenue entrance.
  6. Chimneys: One simple chimney with a corbelled top is found on the rear (south elevation).
  7. Openings:
    - a. Doorways: All exterior doors are c. 1960 aluminum and glass.
    - b. Windows: Windows on the upper two floors are primarily 6/6 double hung wood units. Small, narrow windows are 1/1 double hung wood units. Glass block dating from the 1960's infills the large openings above the east and west entrances. Basement windows are 2/2 double hung wood sash units.
  8. Roof:
    - a. Shape, covering: The original roof is flat, currently covered in EPDM over plywood and wood framing to create an exaggerated slope to drains.
    - b. Cornice: The parapet/cornice is of terra cotta and brick. A dentil course in brick is corbelled above the freize.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans: 1/16" = 1'0" floor plans are enclosed.
  2. Stairways: The stairs at the east and west ends of the buildings serve all floors. The central stair connects the first floor to the exterior grade. All are of similar construction in steel, with marble treads. Handrails are wood with steel pickets; newel posts are steel tubes with a decorative flattened sphere-like top.

3. Flooring: Basement flooring is resilient tile. On the first and second floors, corridor floors are grey marble. Floors in other spaces are primarily strip hardwood, although some are covered in resilient tile. Toilet room floors are of marble.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are primarily painted plaster. First and second floor corridors have a wainscot of white and green marble. A painted picture mold is found throughout the corridors and classrooms. Ceilings are painted plaster.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Typical classroom doors are three-paneled oak with three patterned glass lites. Above the door is a patterned glass transom. Casings are nominal 1" x 4" oak with a cap molding across the door head.
  - b. Windows: Windows have a sill and apron moulding, typically painted. There is no casing.
6. Decorative feature and trim: There is a wood and glass partition between the corridor and the office area on the second floor. The divided glass lites at each glass opening are repeated in the central door.
7. Hardware: Brass mortise locksets with keyed cylinders are used throughout the building. Hardware is plain and utilitarian.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Cast iron radiators of standard design are found throughout the building.
  - b. Lighting: All light fixtures are mid twentieth century pendant fluorescents with blade diffusers.
  - c. Plumbing - All fixture date from the 1964 renovation.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The neighborhood is a mix of residential and commercial uses. The topography is essentially flat. The main facade of the building faces north.
2. Associated buildings on the site:
  - a. The Gothic Revival brick St. Mary's Church was built in 1901-1919. The church is cruciform in plan, and is unusual in having three spires. The church dominates both the site and the surrounding neighborhood.
  - b. A 2-1/2 story brick Queen Anne style house with double hung sash (1/1) and an arcaded porch abuts the church on its west side. It functions as a rectory.
  - c. A c. 1930 2-1/2 story cottage-style stone house, with Gothic arched windows, heavy buttresses and slate gable roof, functions as the Convent.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: No drawings used in the construction of the building have been located.
- B. Historic View: View of school from Church Ave. looking southwest, taken from Church files.
- C. Interview: Father Thomas Kram of St. Mary's Parish, telephone interview, November 3, 1989.
- D. Bibliography:

Berbach, Sister Mercedes. St. Mary's Help of Christians  
125th Jubilee 1980.

Data Pertinent to Heating System Changes,  
St. Mary's R.C. Church,  
McKees Rocks, PA.  
4 - 18" x 24" blueprints, 6/6/58.

Kidney, Walter C., Landmark  
Architecture: Pittsburgh and Allegheny  
County. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History  
and Landmarks Foundation, 1985.

Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey  
Form, Code No. 003-69-725-125.  
"St. Mary's R.C. Church". Prepared  
by Pittsburgh History and Landmarks  
Foundation, 3/26/81.

The Pittsburgh Gazette, September 3, 1923

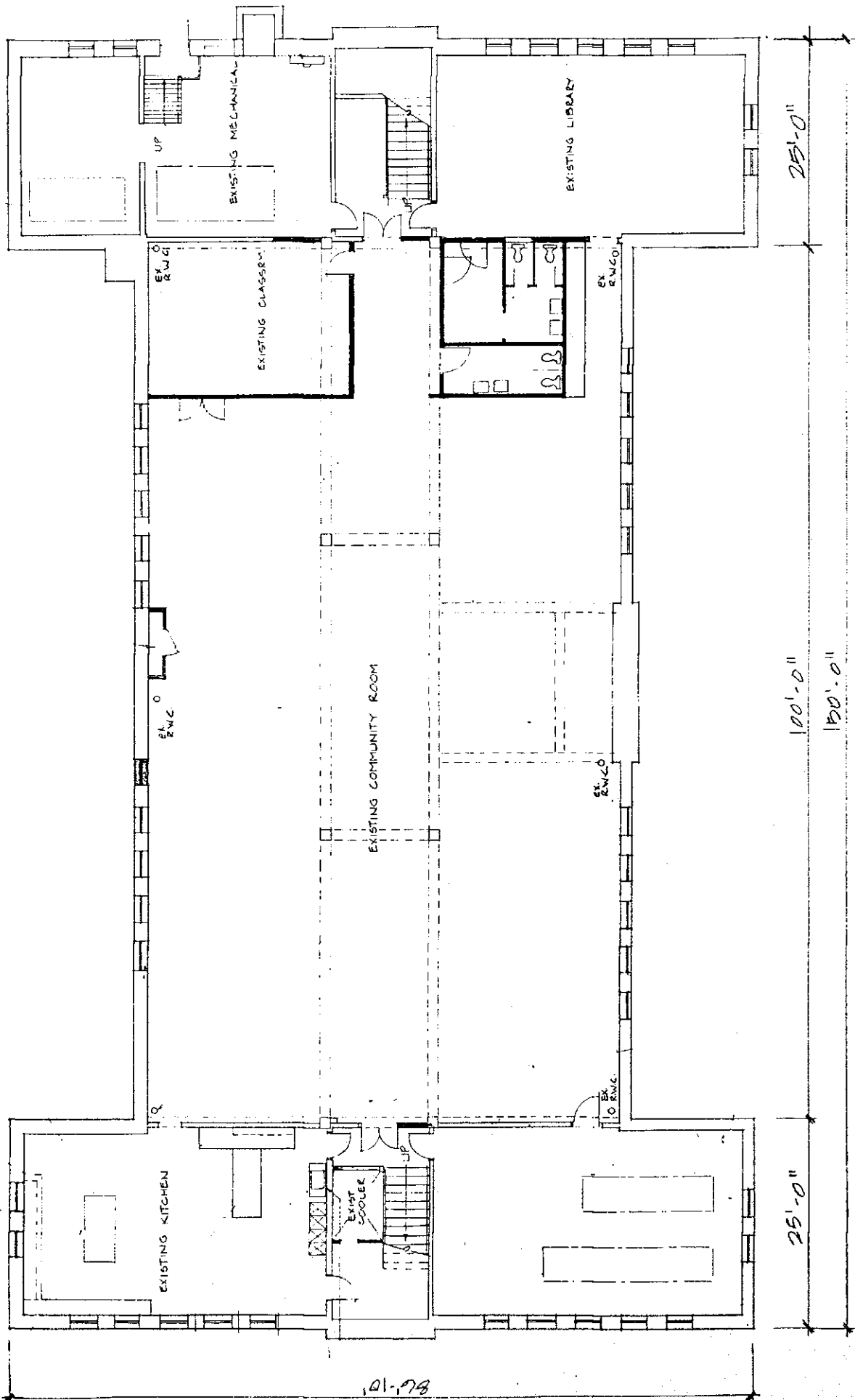
Ruscitto, George, AIA and Associates.  
Alteration to School Building,  
Saint Mary Help of Christian,  
6 - 24" x 36" blueline prints.  
5/9/64.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

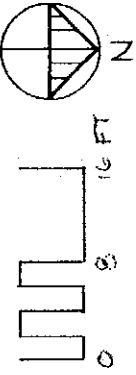
The project, known as Leo Meyer Manor, consists of converting the St. Mary's School into a fifty unit extended attention elderly residence. Extended attention provides care to people who are unable to live independently, but who do not require nursing home care. The federal program involved in the development of the project is HUD Section 221(d)3 Mortgage Insurance.

Prepared by: Kevin G. Scott  
Title: Registered Architect  
Affiliation: Lorenzi, Dodds &  
                    Gunnill, Architects  
                    for Leo Meyer Manor  
Date: November 24, 1989

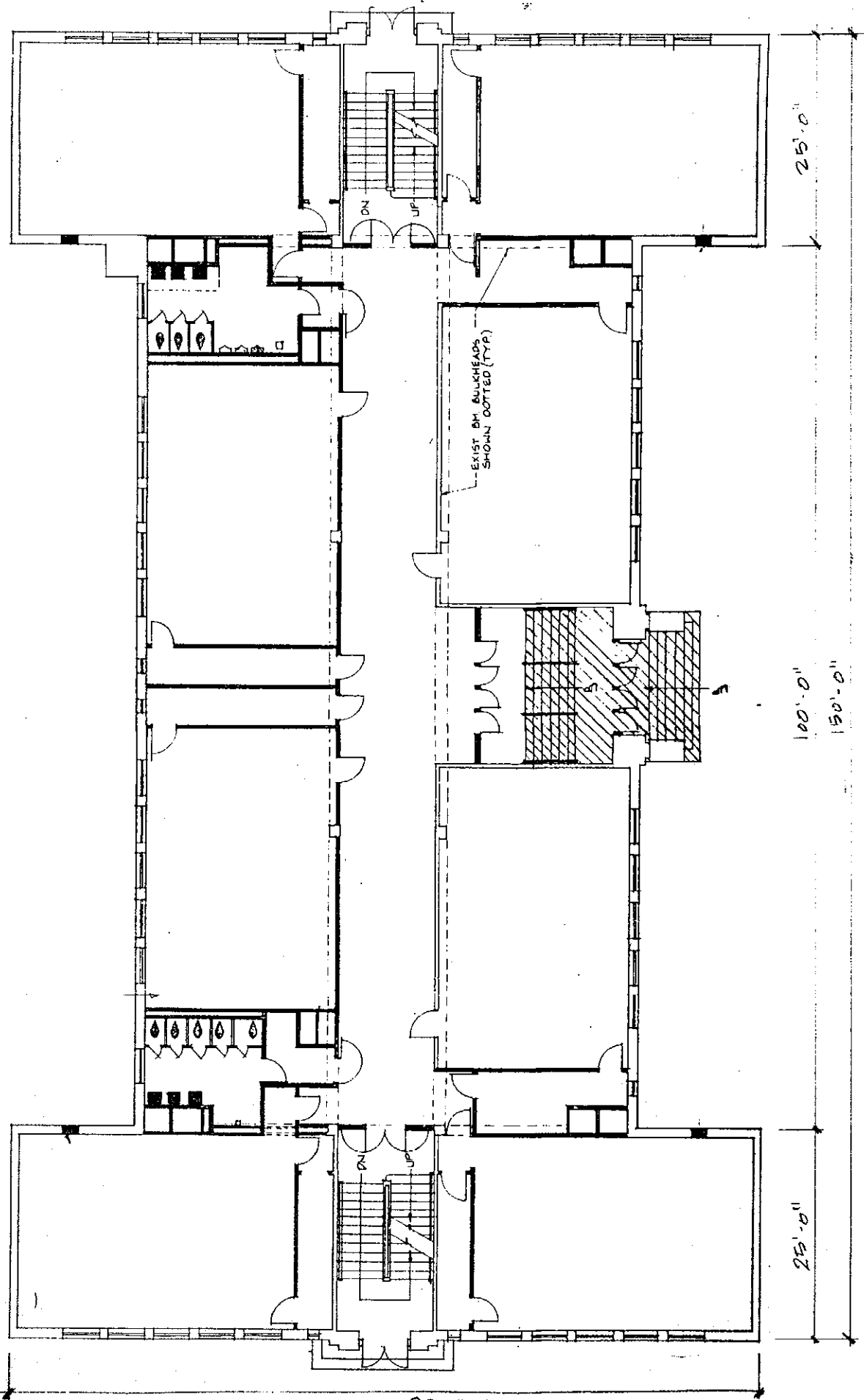
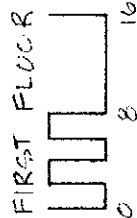




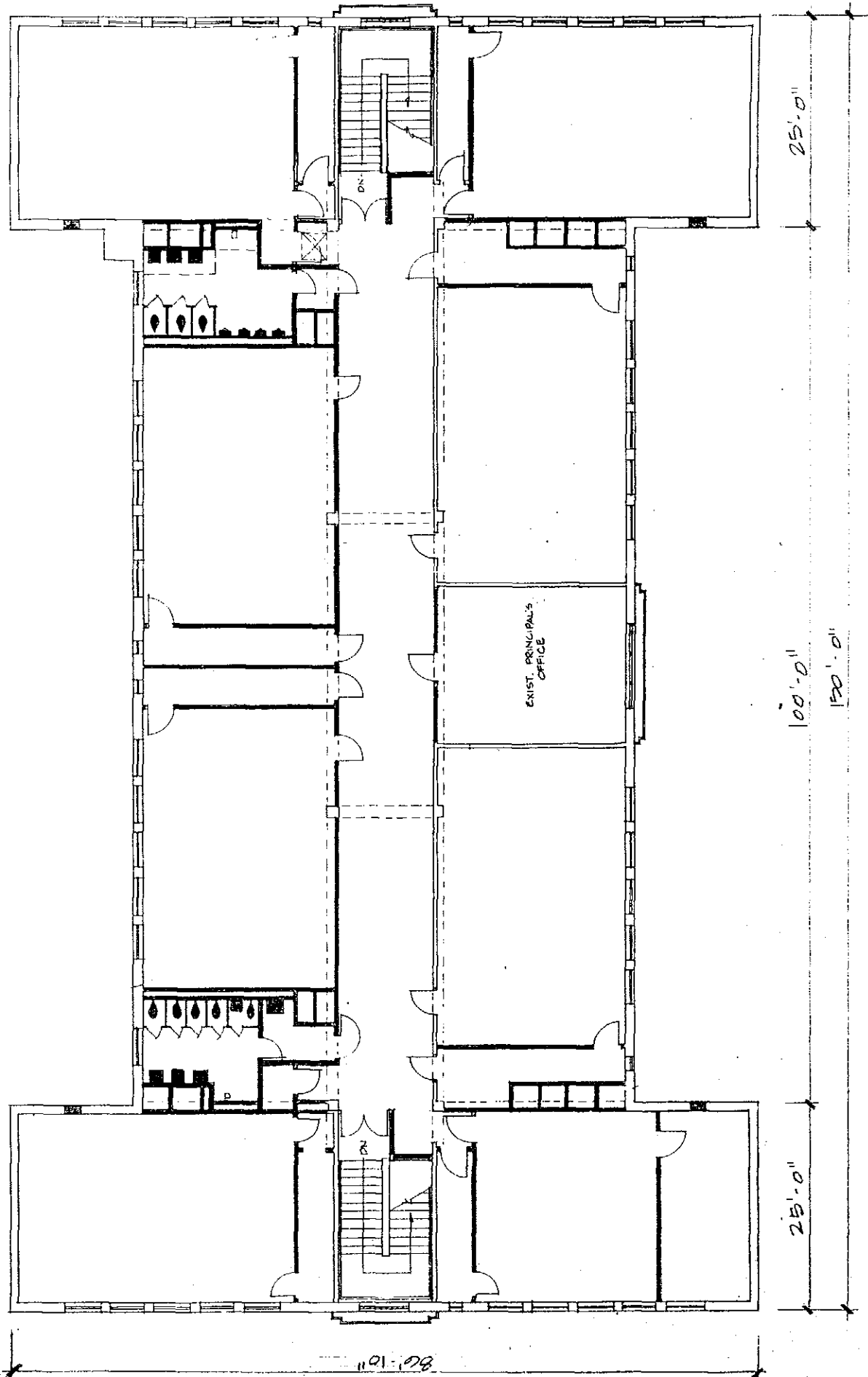
BASEMENT PLAN



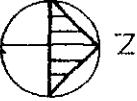
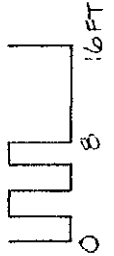
ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
NOVEMBER 1989



ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
NOVEMBER, 1989



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ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
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